

# Records Storage

## Introduction

It is neither prudent nor possible to keep every record created or received within the confines of most state offices. Office space should contain only those records necessary for conducting daily business effectively. Alternative methods of storage are needed for the maintenance of semicurrent or inactive records: those that must be kept for administrative, legal, or fiscal reasons, but are not referred to regularly. This is the work of the New Jersey Records Storage Center and its staff.

The frequency of record use by an office determines its activity, and consequently its storage and retrieval requirements. This information is usually generated by a records inventory.

For records management purposes there are two definitions of records activity:

1. **Current or active records** — Reference rates are greater than one per month per cubic foot
2. **Semicurrent or inactive records** — Reference rates are less than one per month per cubic foot

In addition to determining the rates of reference, measuring the volume of record holdings is essential for both current and future space requirements. For these purposes, approximate measurement is sufficient: assume that a standard legal file drawer contains about two cubic feet and ignore fractions less than a half cubic foot (see the Table of Volumes at end of this section).

## Records Storage Objectives

Low-cost maintenance and protection of semicurrent records are the goals of records storage techniques. As part of a comprehensive records management program for state agencies and authorities, the New Jersey Records Storage Center provides:

1. Orderly periodic transfer and storage of records that must be retained for limited retention periods but have low reference rates
2. Standards for indexing, transferring, and controlling semicurrent records
3. Fast, efficient retrieval services, generally with a turnaround time of twenty-four hours or less from receipt of reference request to delivery of records requested

By using the Records Storage Center (RSC), state agencies and authorities will be able to save thousands of dollars per year, chiefly through economies in space and equipment. Some

organizations will be able to relinquish costly storage leases and realize direct savings, while others will regain productive use of valuable offices and realize indirect savings.

For example, records housed in office space in standard five-drawer vertical file cabinets require one square foot of storage space for each cubic foot of records. (With these cabinets, reference space requires an additional square foot for each cubic foot of records.) Records stored on steel shelves in the three-story Records Storage Center take up only one square foot of floor space for **five** cubic feet of records. In addition, as an inexpensive “warehouse,” the RSC simply costs less per square foot than prime office space.

**Executive Order 109** requires the transfer of state government records currently stored in decentralized, expensive, leased or state-owned property to the Records Storage Center. This is in keeping with the nationwide use of consolidated storage services for state governments.

## Records Storage Process

### Primary Concerns

Use of the Records Storage Center provides two essential services for state agencies and authorities:

1. The first service is protection against damage or destruction from:
  - a. **Fire** — The Records Storage Center contains only semicurrent records, not the common mix of active and inactive records, used office furniture, chemicals and combustibles, etc.  
  
Additionally the center has a twenty-four hour central-station fire alarm and a fire-suppression system.
  - b. **Pests, vermin, and pollution** — The organic substances in leather, pastes, and paper are a good source of food for vermin. Accumulated dust and debris provide a haven for the growth of insects and mold.  
  
The Records Storage Center is a clean, well-kept facility in which records are repeatedly spot-checked during the process of accommodating reference requests.
  - c. **Temperature and humidity** — Extreme fluctuations of temperature and humidity will hasten records deterioration.  
  
The Records Storage Center provides environmentally monitored, constant office-type temperature and humidity.
2. The second service is the safeguarding of privacy and security:
  - a. **Access authorization** — Semicurrent records stored in the Records Storage Center remain the property of their office of origin: only physical custody is transferred to the

RSC. Records center staff will permit use only by personnel listed on a “Records Center Access Authorization Form,” as filed by appropriate officials (see appendix C).

- b. **Theft prevention** — The Records Storage Center is a guarded building protected by a twenty-four hour central-station intrusion alarm.

## Records Transfer

### Storage Criteria

To transfer records to the Records Storage Center, records must:

1. Appear on an approved records retention schedule
2. Be scheduled for a minimum of one year of storage and a maximum of ten years
3. Be properly identified and documented for transfer and reference by using the “Records Transfer Request” form
4. Be properly packed in Records Storage Center boxes (see appendix C)
5. Have a specific date (month and year) when disposition will take place

The “Records Storage Center Criteria and Instructions for Transfer of Records” contains this and other information, including an item-by-item guide to completing an actual records transfer request (see appendix C).

Certainly, not all records should be transferred to storage. Reference rates and retention periods are prime factors in determining the appropriateness of semicurrent storage. Additionally, some semicurrent records should be kept in office space when volumes are minimal.

The Division of Archives and Records Management may require an analysis of records targeted for transfer to the RSC to determine whether microfilming should be used instead of semicurrent storage. Factors included in such an analysis are:

1. Length of retention period
2. Volume and access rates
3. Security and preservation considerations
4. Cost effectiveness

In all cases, division analysts are available to analyze potential storage or filming applications.

Because their storage requirements are considerably more complex, permanent records are never eligible for transfer to the Records Storage Center. Permanent records may be transferred to the State Archives as soon as they become inactive in their agency of origin (see Section IV).

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### **Preparation for Transfer**

Semicurrent record series are packed in standard records cartons in the order in which they were filed in their office of origin. To make reference easier, approximately 1 1/2 inches of space should be left in every box. All of the records, whether letter or legal size, should be packed parallel to the long (15- inch) side of the carton so they will be perpendicular to the front of the shelf when stored. In case of fire, this packing method prevents records from falling out of the boxes and feeding flames. (See appendix C — Records Storage Box Packing Instructions.) Additionally, records that are packed correctly may survive a fire with only minimal singeing of edges.

At the time, of packing, a “Records Transfer Request” form (see appendix C) should be used to itemize the contents of each box. This serves as both documentation of the transfer to the RSC and later as an index for physically locating specific records for reference.

Each storage box must be labeled by the originating agency. The RSC requires that the Records Transfer form be submitted prior to physical transfer of the records to permit processing.

### **Receipt by the Records Center**

RSC staff will physically move properly prepared records from their offices of origin to the Records Storage Center. Once records arrive at RSC, the staff checks general contents and disposition dates against the records transfer list. In some instances, originating agency personnel can transport the records on their own, upon approval by RSC staff.

RSC staff relabels each box with an assigned physical location in the records center along with the disposition date, enters this data on the division’s automated storage system, and places the boxes in appropriate shelf spaces. The new label replaces the preliminary label of the originating agency. RSC personnel then add records center location numbers to the records transfer list for each box and returns a copy of this amended list to the agency. Once the agency receives the list, it uses it as a receipt of the successful transfer, as well as an index for locating specific records.

Unlike a central file room, which is essentially a self-service operation, a records center employs a staff responsible for overseeing procedures and providing services. The RSC staff of trained, experienced technicians perform a range of services including:

1. Records pick-up from agency or authority premises
2. Records preparation — preparing records for storage in the RSC, including indexing on an automated storage system
3. Retrieval and reference for agency records stored in the RSC (restricted to authorized agency representatives only)
4. Destruction of records whose retention periods have expired, after review and approval by appropriate agency or authority officials

### **Reference Services**

The Records Storage Center provides reference services that include both retrieval and delivery of records to authorized officials who request them. Additionally, the staff will relay information by telephone, or mail or fax photocopies of a few pages. Patrons may also use the RSC's reference room to examine records in person. Semicurrent storage offers authorized officials the ability to look at selected records while providing the security of leaving the original document in the records center.

RSC has physical custody and is responsible for maintenance and protection against damage or unauthorized access. The transferring office retains legal custody of its own records and controls use and access. That office must therefore regularly supply and update a list of authorized employees who may make reference requests. No other individuals may request information about the records in storage. It is the duty of records center staff to determine if an individual is authorized before releasing any information. (See appendix C — Records Center Access Authorization and Reference Request forms.)

Whenever an agency borrows from the Records Storage Center, RSC staff records on a "Reference Request" form:

1. Records removed
2. Date of removal
3. Official to whom records have been delivered

This system documents each reference request and tracks withdrawn records. Such care is very seldom given to records not stored at the Records Storage Center.

## Disposal Procedures

Records center staff periodically reviews box transfer lists to determine if disposition dates are imminent or if any records are being held beyond their retention periods. RSC staff also monitors modifications of records retention schedules to determine whether such changes affect an item in storage. Disposition dates of series held in storage are also verified.

From information gathered during these reviews, the RSC can send notices to appropriate agencies and authorities describing the cartons of records eligible for destruction, circling the items completed on photocopies of the original transfer request and providing a four-part "Request and Authorization for Records Disposal" form. The office of origin need simply verify which records are earmarked for destruction, provide appropriate signatures, and remove items it considers necessary for continuing business despite expiration of retention. Once the signed, intact disposal request is returned to the division and approved, RSC staff will oversee the destruction of targeted records and update their files to reflect changes in record holdings.

RSC staff arranges for the destruction of such records in accordance with state environmental restrictions, with special care taken in the case of confidential or sensitive records to prevent the release of their contents to unauthorized individuals or agencies: vendors certify that records picked up will be destroyed or recycled in accordance with the law.

## Summary

Records storage is made possible for state agencies and authorities by the successful completion of records inventories that identify records, their accumulations, locations, and rates of activity. Inventories, in turn, form the basis for records retention and disposition schedules. Retention schedules designate when a record may be transferred and disposed.

Records become semicurrent once their use rate declines to less than once per month per cubic foot, provided there are no mitigating conditions that favor another alternative. Agencies then place them in standard records boxes, which hold approximately one cubic foot and weigh between 30 - 35 pounds, packing them to maximize space, allow removal for reference, and minimize chance of spills.

Records are then transferred to the Records Storage Center — a secure, environmentally monitored, low-cost, high-density storage facility for state government records, administered by the Department of State, Division of Archives and Records Management. The RSC offers all storage and associated services free-of-charge to state agencies and authorities.

The RSC provides centralized, indexed storage of numbered, standard cartons on three-story steel shelves. RSC staff screens requests for access and provides reference services to duly authorized officials. Such services include prompt (usually a twenty-four hour turnaround time) delivery of originals or duplicates of requested records, telephone service when appropriate, as well as on-site reference service.

Timely and consistent transfer to storage of appropriate semicurrent records reduces costs for real estate, equipment, and supplies, and increases efficiency in active files management. Aiding state government officials and their staff with records storage considerations is the work of the records storage section of the division.

Additionally, **Executive Order 109** requires the transfer of state government records currently stored in decentralized, expensive, leased or state-owned property to the Records Storage Center. This is in keeping with the nationwide use of consolidated storage services for state governments.

To obtain assistance, call the Records Storage Center at (609) 530-3221, or write: New Jersey Department of State, Division of Archives and Records Management, 2300 Stuyvesant Avenue, CN 307, Trenton, New Jersey, 08625.